

Remarks at a Democratic Dinner in Nashua, New Hampshire February 17, 1996

Thank you very much. Please relax. [*Laughter*] I have had a wonderful day today, the second wonderful day in just 2 weeks in New Hampshire. And to all of you who had anything to do with that day or the one before, to all of you who helped me in 1992 in the primary and then to win this State in the general election, which surprised everybody in the world, I want to thank you.

I thank chairman Joe Keefe and your vice chair, Mary Chambers, and my dear friend Anita Freedman, and Keith Regli and the other officers of the Democratic Party, and your DNC members, Terry Shumaker and Stephanie Powers and Ambassador Bruno—it has a nice ring to it, don't you think—[*laughter*]—for their service to our party. And I want to say a special word of thanks to Congressman Dick Swett and John Rauh for being willing to fight and struggle to guarantee that we win that United States Senate seat for the Democrats in November.

Somebody asked me this morning when I was coming up here, what in the world I was doing going to New Hampshire. They said, "You don't have an opponent." I said, "Well, for once I'd like to win the New Hampshire primary." [*Laughter*] "And it seems that this might be a good opportunity, so I thought I would go up and try."

When I was a young fellow, when I ran for Governor the first time, I had my—sort of unfortunate thing that happens to anyone in public life, where you plan something, and you think it's going to be so wonderful, and it doesn't make any news because something else happens on that day. And that happened to me. I had helped all these tomato farmers in my hometown—my home State—in a little town in south Arkansas, who were working—legal migrant workers—to improve their conditions, to give them decent places to live, and in the process, to be sure they could get a permit to get these people to help them. And it saved this little town that was going to otherwise dry up and blow away.

So they invited me to town one day when I was campaigning for Governor. And unbeknownst to me they had decided to have a parade in my honor. And they had a banner over

the street. There are about 400 people in this town. It was hardly a metropolis. It was sort of your standard Arkansas or New Hampshire town. But I was blown away. I mean, you know, I was 32 years old. I thought it was pretty hot stuff to have a parade down the street. [*Laughter*]

And the whole—the high school band—the schools let out—the high school band led me down the street. Everybody was laughing and screaming and crying for joy. And the next day there was not a single word about it in the newspaper—[*laughter*]—because something else happened in the Governor's race. So I spent the next umpty-dump months until the election saying, "You should have seen the crowd in Hermitage." [*Laughter*] People made fun of me. They'd say every time, you know, "Just punch him, and he'll automatically say, 'You should have seen'—like one of those toy dolls—'You should have seen the'—so for the rest of my life I'll be saying, 'You should have seen the crowd in Keene today in New Hampshire.'"

At first when I arrived there, you know, because I waited so long this morning—I got up at a quarter to 6 and I was ready to go at 7 and they said we couldn't leave until 8. And then we got to the airport, and they said we couldn't leave. And we stayed there for 2 hours while the winds whipped across the runway, and they wouldn't let me take off. And we were very late to Rochester, but at least they were warm. And I call in and say, "I'm coming; please wait," and they did, and it was quite wonderful.

But when I got to Keene, they'd been standing out in the cold for an hour and a half. And at first I thought, they'll have to leave; they won't be able to take it. And then when I saw the crowd and I thought, my God, they're frozen there; they can't leave if they wanted to go—[*laughter*]—then I realized that, sure enough, they actually believed in what we were all doing and they were there to stand up for what they believed in and to fight for a better future. And it was very—[*applause*].

Let me say to all of you one thing I said 4 years ago that everyone needs reminding of now. These elections are not about the candidates; they're about the people. The Presi-

dential election is nothing more or less than the most important hiring decision the American people can make. And ultimately, the hiring decision must, therefore, turn on whether the employers show up to make the decision, first of all, and secondly, on what their vision is for where they want our common enterprise to go.

When I came here 4 years ago, I was concerned that our country was not changing as fast as we should change or moving in the right direction, given what I thought the future was going to present; that we were neither going to seize the opportunities or meet the challenges of the 21st century. And I had a very simple message, which I still share and think about every day. I believe it is wrong for any person to be deprived of the opportunity to live up to the fullest of their God-given abilities. I believe everybody should have a chance to work for the American dream.

I believe it is wrong for this country to be divided in artificial ways, in ways that make us all less than we ought to be. And I believe it would be a tragedy if we were to walk away from the responsibilities that we have now, having won the cold war, to lead the world toward greater peace and prosperity and freedom. I believed then and I believe now that we have to pursue a simple strategy in which we work together to create more opportunity, in which we work together and demand more responsibility from ourselves and from each other, and in which we create in this country a genuine spirit of community.

I do not believe, as I told you 4 years ago, that the answers to all of our challenges can be found in Government, nor do I believe Government is at all points even the most important player in our great national drama. But neither do I believe we can go back to the time when the American people were told they should just fend for themselves. That would be a terrible mistake. And down deep inside, almost every American knows that would be a terrible mistake.

A couple of days ago I flew out to Washington and Oregon, and I'm sure you've seen on the television the absolutely horrible floods they have been enduring. And I went into one of the little towns in Washington State, just across the Oregon border, that had been badly flooded out. And I rode around town with the mayor, who had been the police chief for 20 years or something before he got elected mayor.

There's 3,300 people in this town. And these folks were just, you know, like most folks here. And he took me to a block that had been wiped out. And we went into a home of a 70-year-old couple who had been married for, I don't know, nearly 50 years. They had lost every single thing they had except a few pictures and a couple of pieces of furniture. The man was hard of hearing, and he had even lost his hearing aid in the flood. The water just rushed it away.

But when I showed up to meet this fellow, he said "You know, I'm 70, and I've never met a President. It was nearly worth losing my home to do it." [Laughter] And he said, "Besides that, you know, it's fitting because now I can show you to my indoor swimming pool." [Laughter] It was unbelievable. How can this man laugh? He's lost everything.

I saw another man well up into his sixties, a retired employee of a utility company who was a Norwegian immigrant, naturalized citizen, who worked in that flood for 8 hours with a jackhammer with a cracked rib. Now I don't know if any of you have ever tried to hold a jackhammer where it was supposed to go, but it's not easy on a good day if you're big, strapping, strong, and know what you're doing. And I thought about that. And he did it without a second thought. It was just his duty.

And I saw all these stories that you always hear whenever there's a natural disaster. But the most important point I want to make to you is, on the way out, this 70-year-old man said to me, he said, "Boy, I'm glad you came, and I've enjoyed talking to you." But he said, "Don't you think it's too bad that we don't behave this way toward each other all the time?" And that's what I want to say to you.

This is a very great country. I know we get down, we get frustrated. But when I talk to other world leaders, they often ask me, they say, "Oh, we see these opinion polls about how Americans say the country is going in the wrong direction or they're pessimistic or they don't believe in their political system." And they say, "After all, you have the highest job growth rate, the highest rate of new business creation, the greatest amount of opportunity for individuals, the lowest deficit as a percentage of your income, and the strongest sense of security and defense of any country in the world. How could your people be down?"

I know this is a perplexing time. When I was here 4 years ago, if I had told you, for

example, that 3 years from now I'll come back and in only 3 years I will have kept my commitment to cut the deficit in half, and I'll be almost there on our commitment to provide 8 million new jobs—we're at 7.7 million—and credit will be more readily available than it used to be; and the Small Business Administration will cut its budget by 40 percent and double its loan volume; and we will start selling more products abroad than we are importing from abroad, so at least the growth rate in exports will be greater than growth rate in imports. We're closing the gap. And the unemployment rate in New Hampshire will be under 3½ percent; it will be less than half of what it was at election time last year, but there will still be uncertainty out there about our economy because of the downsizing of big companies and because there's still a lot of people who are working hard and never get a raise; and because there's still people who can't afford to have health insurance for their families, you would have found that hard to believe, I think.

It is happening because we're living in a very different world that is absolutely exploding with opportunities and still full of challenges. That's why I talked as I did in the State of the Union.

And you could say that the answer is to run away from the world: "We'll just pretend the modern world's not happening. We'll put a wall up around America, and we'll just run away from it." But that won't work. The answer is to run through the barriers until everybody can have the opportunity now that most people do but a lot of people don't. That's the answer.

Technology, for example, is a mixed blessing for people who can't access it, but it's an unmixed blessing for all of our students. When I was in Concord the other day, a couple of days after they'd connected all the classrooms in the city to the Internet, and I saw in, I think, the school with the lowest per capita income in the city, all these kids that were taking computer equipment home at night and working on it, I realized that technology for them was a great equalizer.

When I was in Union City, New Jersey, a couple of days ago, a school district that was almost closed down by the State, a district with low per capita income, a lot of immigrants, and I saw that a partnership between the government, the school district—Bell Atlantic had put a computer not only in every school and classroom but in every home so that immigrant par-

ents were E-mailing the principal to find out how their kids were doing. All of a sudden, this desperately poor school had a higher attendance rate, a lower dropout rate, a higher graduation rate, and higher test scores than the State average in one of the wealthiest States in the United States of America. We can make this new world work for all Americans. And that's what I am trying to do.

There's no point in my reiterating here for all of you—because you keep up—what I said in the State of the Union. I outlined what I believe are the challenges for the future and how I want to balance the budget. I'm not against balancing the budget. We—our administration, the Democrats, the Democratic Party—cut the deficit in half alone. And don't you ever forget it—alone.

And we took a lot of other tough decisions. But we have to do this in a way that is consistent with our values, with our obligations to our parents and to our children, with our obligations to the environment and to our future. That's what we have to do.

And we have to face the challenges of the future. And we have to be willing to take tough decisions. But when we do, and we turn out to be right, we shouldn't be ashamed to go tell people we did the right thing, it was unpopular. I'll just give you one example, because one of your Congressmen paid a terrible price for it.

We got beat up pretty bad for the Brady bill and for the assault weapons ban. And a lot of good, rural people, who work hard and are honest citizens, were driven away from our party in the November 1994 elections because they were convinced that we were out to take away their right to have their weapons to go hunting. Well, as I have said all over New Hampshire, we had a great duck season in Arkansas, and you had a good deer season in New Hampshire, and everybody that wanted to went out and shot their ducks and their deer with the same gun they did last year. So the people that told those folks that we were messing with them were not telling them the truth. They did not lose any guns. But I'll tell you who did lose guns. There were over 40,000 criminals who could not get guns because the Brady bill is the law of the land.

So it makes a difference. It makes a difference that the family and medical leave law passed. It makes a difference that we doubled

the tax break for lower income working families so nobody works full time and is still in poverty if they have children in the home. These things make a difference. It makes a difference that we improved the student loan program, extended it to more people, made it easier to repay, and still cut the default rate in half.

It makes a difference that the welfare rolls are going down, and we're giving States a lot more permission to move people from welfare to work, but we're also collecting record amounts of child support payments for parents and their children. These things make a difference.

It makes a difference to your children's future that there are no nuclear weapons pointed at the children of the United States for the first time since the dawn of the nuclear age. And I thank Chairman Keefe for what he said about the efforts of the United States in the Middle East, to Haiti, to South Africa, to Northern Ireland. And now in this cold winter, the men and women of our Armed Forces are in Bosnia helping to stop a war of madness and to bring peace and decency and honor back to that war-torn land. And I'm proud of them.

What I want to say to you is that we know what we have to do, and we know what we believe in. And now the American people know that all the old clichés—"tax and spend," "soft on crime," "weak on welfare"—that it's all a bunch of bull. And that—[applause]—"weak on defense," "no concern about foreign policy," all that's a bunch of bull. But what is not a bunch of bull is that this country has enormous opportunities and enormous challenges. And we can only meet them together. And we need our Government not to be a big bureaucratic obstacle to progress. We need it to be an entrepreneurial, creative, vigorous, but strong supporter and partner of progress. That's what we need.

And you know, I've been telling this ever since I read it in James Carville's book, but—[laughter]—and it's not funny even. But I had never thought about it until I read it in the book, that people always bad-mouth Government. You know, we've been doing it since we started. I mean, it's as old as the Founders. After all, half our people came here to our shores to get away from oppressive government. And the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, the whole thing is set up to keep Government from treading on us too much.

So if we're not careful, we just uncritically act like every governmental action is messing up a one-car parade. But the truth is, in the last 30 years, half of your tax money has been spent on just three things: Social Security, Medicare, and national defense. Did you get your money's worth? We won the cold war. The elderly poverty rate was cut in half. And if you live to be 65, our seniors have the longest life expectancy of any country in the world. I think we did what was required of us, and we got our money's worth.

Where would we be today without the Head Start program? I was just—where would we be today without the student loan program, without the college aid program? I was just at New Hampshire College, and the chairman of the board there told me that 90 percent of the students at that school are getting Federal aid to help them go to college. That's a good investment. We're going to get our money back. They're going to make us stronger.

And so I ask you to do what you can to get a surprising vote out on Tuesday, just to stand up for what is good and decent and positive and right about this country and for what is necessary to be done so that we can become all we ought to become. I ask you to go out there because we do have a big opponent. It is cynicism. It is the willingness to believe that public life is always the lowest common denominator, that nothing matters, really, in the end.

It is the vulnerabilities to those strategies that would divide us when we desperately need to be united. Those are our enemies. And frankly, that's not a Government problem. Cynicism in any form in human endeavor is a cheap, lousy excuse for inaction by the person who has the luxury of being cynical.

In Portland, Oregon, the other day, when they told them that the city of Portland was going to be flooded because the floodwall would not hold, in one day, 1,000 people showed up and built the floodwall another foot and a half higher. They had no luxury, no time, no effort, no opportunity to be cynical. And I go back to what that old man said, "It's just too bad we can't act like that all the time."

And that's what I want you to do Tuesday. That's what I want you to do between now and November. I want you to recover the spirit, the genius of the New Hampshire town hall meeting, of all those visits we had in 1992. I want you to make people believe again that they

can make a difference. Because if we're going to be partners, it all begins with the citizens.

Harry Truman said when he went home to Independence that he was going to now have the most exalted title you could have in the United States, the title of citizen. This is a State where citizenship has a reputation of being honed to a fine art. It's a State now where people are being given an opportunity to see that there are now alternative visions of change for the future, very different roadmaps to the future. If 1992 was about change versus no change, 1996 is about two very different visions of change.

I have done my best to be there for you, as my old saying goes, 'til the last dog dies. But now you have got to be there for your friends and for your neighbors. I am telling you, I know, I have seen the world as it is, and I believe I understand where it is going. We are on the verge of the era of greatest possibility our country has ever known, but we have very serious challenges that we have to meet to get

there if everybody is going to have their shot at the American dream and if we're going to go there together.

I believe we will. I know I am an optimist, but when I look at you, when I looked at the faces that I saw today in those three stops I made before I got here, when I know what is really in the heart of the American people, and when I understand that we've been around for nearly 220 years because most of the time we do the right thing—if you will go out there and do what you can, yes, it will advance the cause of our party but far, far more important, it will advance the future of our country and these children that are here.

Do it. Do it for me. And one time, let me win the New Hampshire primary. [*Laughter*]

God bless you, and thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:19 p.m. at the Sheraton Tara Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to George Charles Bruno, U.S. Ambassador to Belize.

Statement on the Terrorist Attack in London, United Kingdom *February 19, 1996*

It is with great sadness that I once again express my condolences to the victims of an IRA bomb in London. These cowardly acts of terrorism are the work of individuals determined to thwart the will of the people of Northern Ireland. They want peace. I condemn these acts of violence in the strongest possible terms and hope those responsible are brought swiftly to justice.

Over the last 17 months, the people of Northern Ireland have tasted peace and grown accustomed to the blessings of a normal life. We must not let the men of the past ruin the future

of the children in Northern Ireland. The Irish and British Governments are engaged in intensive efforts to move the peace process forward. I strongly believe that is the path to follow.

For our part, we will continue our dialog with the Irish and British Governments and the parties to support their efforts to restore the cease-fire and find a lasting and just peace. We look forward to the summit expected at the end of the month between the Irish and British Governments. I am hopeful they will find a way to peace.

Remarks on the Observance of Eid al-Fitr *February 20, 1996*

On behalf of all Americans, I want to extend my personal greetings to the entire Muslim community here in the United States

and around the world as it celebrates the Eid al-Fitr.